

A

VOICE FROM THE PEOPLE;

ADDRESSED

TO THE MEMBERS

OF

THE WESLEYAN METHODIST SOCIETY,

IN THE

FIRST MANCHESTER CIRCUIT.

BY A LAYMAN.

MANCHESTER:

PUBLISHED BY LOVE AND BARTON, NEWALL'S BUILDINGS, MARKET-STREET,
AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1834.

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LOVE AND BARTON, PRINTERS, MANCHESTER.

Wes. 1484

A VOICE FROM THE PEOPLE, &c.

I wish to be understood here as addressing myself to those Members of the Society, who, from motives of compassion and sympathy, combined with a sense of justice, have espoused the cause of Dr. Warren, in the present unhappy differences, arising from his opposition to the "Wesleyan Theological Institution;" and of you, I beg, as lovers of justice, as advocates of good order, and, above all, as friends to Methodism, and the cause of God as promoted by its means, to attend to these remarks: their object is to endeavour to show, that many statements which have been put forward on this occasion are partial, and convey a wrong impression of the case; and to this endeavour, which is at the least, well meant, I beseech your patient hearing. However we may differ on some points, all must agree that the present state of things is much to be regretted, and must give rise to discussions that are highly painful to the pious mind; and the true interests of religion and Christian charity cannot but suffer from it. You will, therefore, I trust, concur with me in endeavouring to come to a true understanding on the subject, and thus ending this disagreeable affair. As you have heard one side, now hear the other: you must acknowledge nothing can be fairer than this; and, however warmly you may now feel, only suspend your judgment till this explanation is made, and then your right to exercise it is undoubted.—"Strike—but hear."

You have been led to believe, from numerous quar-

ters, that Dr. Warren has come forward on this occasion as the conscientious and consistent opponent of the Institution, on the grounds of its being unnecessary, as well as likely to prove detrimental to the spread of genuine religion. Now, without entering upon the question of the merits or demerits of the Institution itself, (which it is not my present business to do), we will proceed, from the Dr.'s own admission, to examine his pretensions to consistency. He admits, that on the first suggestion of the plan, and for some time after, he concurred in it,—agreed to the principal resolutions, thereby giving all the sanction he possibly could to the *principle* of the measure, he even proposed to give the name of *College* to it, which was rejected by the Committee as too high sounding, and as being out of place; the Institution being intended not so much for the education of young men, as for their immediate preparation for the work of the ministry; and last of all, he went so far as to vote for Mr. Bunting's appointment to the presidency. What! I hear some of you exclaim, is this possible? can it be, that Dr. Warren, to whom we are taught to look up as so consistent, pure, and disinterested an enemy to ministerial encroachments, should, so recently as last July, have endeavoured to invest Mr. Bunting, the individual of all others most suspected of a disposition to encroach on the liberties of the people, with additional influence? There must surely be some powerful reason for so sudden a change.

We will again refer to the Dr.'s pamphlet, and there, after a careful search, no facts whatever appear to be brought forward as furnishing a reason for this change,

except the single circumstance that the two persons proposed by Dr. Warren to fill the remaining vacant offices, were not considered by the rest of his brethren as the most eligible for those situations ; that is, in other words, the Dr.'s sole judgment was not permitted to outweigh that of the remaining nineteen members of the Committee. Whatever construction may be placed on the circumstance, these are the simple facts of the case, and these grounds were considered sufficient to convert him from a warm supporter into a violent opposer of the Institution. And, even allowing for the sake of argument, that the Dr. did see from the manner in which the measures were carried, that the establishment of an Institution in this instance might lead to dangerous results, still that circumstance could not possibly alter his opinion as to the propriety or necessity of Institutions in general ; no objection which he has brought forward has any reference to *the principle* of the measure, but merely to the manner in which this particular affair was conducted : and yet he immediately proceeds to condemn all colleges whatever, to prove that the Methodist preachers have succeeded equally as well without such an advantage as those of other denominations have done with, &c. &c.

Now, I will put it fairly to you, whether an acquaintance of thirty-five years standing with Methodism and with Mr. Bunting, would not have afforded sufficient opportunities of judging if the former really stood in need of an Institution, and if the latter were the fittest person to preside over it : and whether, after having expressed a decided opinion in *favour* of both these points,

the circumstance above mentioned is sufficient to account for so sudden and so great a change, without subjecting the author to the charge of fickleness and inconsistency? What confidence, I ask, can you place in a man whose opinions, formed upon many years experience, can be totally reversed in so short a time; and what security can you have that he will not soon turn back again to his former position, and oppose his present sentiments as violently as he now advocates them?

You have likewise been told that the Dr. is an injured man, that the vote of suspension passed at the District Meeting was unjust, cruel, and unprovoked; that he has been slightly and vindictively treated by his brethren, especially by Mr. Crowther; and it has even been stated by some that the decision of the District Meeting amounted to expulsion, and that the Dr. has been suddenly, and without warning, not only suspended from the exercise of his ministerial functions, but ejected from his dwelling-house, and deprived of his salary. This last charge is soon dismissed; it is only necessary to state in answer, that it is *untrue*! the trustees have never had the slightest intention of removing him from the house he now occupies, where he is at full liberty to remain till Conference; and the payment of his salary will also continue till then, as though nothing had happened. The remaining charges we will now proceed with. The District Meeting has been stigmatised as arbitrary, unjust, &c. 1st. Because they inflicted the sentence of suspension on the Dr., and 2dly, Because his friend, Mr. Bromley, was voted out of the room during the transaction of their business.

To explain their proceedings satisfactorily it will be necessary to recapitulate a few of the circumstances of the case. When the business of the meeting was about to commence, Mr. Newton, the chairman, rose to propose that a friend of his, Mr. Macdonald, a travelling preacher, then on a visit to this town, should be admitted as a spectator, and if it were carried, he would pledge himself, on Mr. M.'s behalf, that he would not, *in any way*, interfere with the business of the meeting, but preserve the strictest neutrality ; this condition was rendered necessary from the rules of the Connexion requiring that no preacher whatever, not actually belonging to the District, shall take any part in the business of its meetings. The proposal was put to the vote and carried, and Mr. Macdonald was accordingly introduced into the room ; he silently took his seat in one corner, and prepared to witness the proceedings of the meeting. Upon which Dr. Warren rose with a similar proposal in behalf of a friend of his own, who was also allowed to be admitted, *expressly upon the same terms*. To the surprise of all present (the Dr. of course excepted), Mr. Bromley, of York, entered the room, walked up to the table, seated himself among the preachers, next to Dr. W., took off his gloves, (produced a memorandum book), and commenced taking notes ; this proceeding was rather an overstepping of the bounds, and contrasted strongly with the conduct of Mr. Macdonald, who had so modestly and strictly complied with the required conditions ; but the meeting overlooked the irregularity, and the business proceeded. However, it was found that Mr. Bromley intended to perform the part

not only of a reporter, but also of prompter and counsellor; for at every question proposed to Dr. Warren, he turned round and entered into conversation with Mr. B., and thus detained the meeting some time before he would give them an answer. Nay, he was on one occasion, so absorbed with his friend as not to hear the questions put to him. This was going a step too far; it was not only violating the stipulations, but losing the time of the meeting, and treating it with contempt; and to overlook such conduct was impossible. Mr. B. was therefore desired to withdraw to some distance from the table, that he might be on the same footing with Mr. Macdonald; which he complied with, at the same time uttering the exclamation (certainly loud enough to be heard by several of those present), "consummate cruelty." This put a finishing stroke to the proceedings: to have their regulations broken, their decisions unjustly stigmatised, and themselves insulted, was too much even for their patience to bear, in fact, to bear this would have been to subject themselves to the charge of pusillanimity and cowardice; and it was accordingly put to the vote and carried, "that all strangers do withdraw," upon which Messrs. Bromley and Macdonald of course left the room. Dr. Warren in consequence of this refused to answer the questions put to him, and determined not to be tried by the District Meeting; and though he was subsequently waited upon at his own house by a deputation from the meeting, who entreated him to submit to constitutional measures, and though the meeting was adjourned to the next day to give him time to retract his hasty determination, still he persevered in it. What

now remained to be done? Such insult and contempt of constituted authority might seem to justify harsh measures, but this meeting (abused and stigmatised as it has been), determined to bear even a little longer, and give their deluded brother another opportunity of repairing his past errors; they therefore came to the conclusion of dissolving the meeting, and calling it together again in one month, during which time certain of Dr. Warren's friends were requested to interpose with their good offices, in order to effect, if possible, an amicable termination to the affair. So that this sentence of suspension, about which so much has been said, is after all no other than a month's leisure granted to Dr. Warren to determine whether he will consent to take his trial before a tribunal, acknowledged and recognized as constitutional, ever since the establishment of Methodism, and the authority of which, moreover the *Dr. himself recognized* by his submission, till the interruption occasioned by Mr. B.'s ejectment.*

Another charge, on which great stress has been laid, remains to be noticed, viz. Mr. Crowther's refusal to accept Dr. Warren's hand at the Quarterly Meeting. To understand the true cause of this, it will be necessary to premise that this meeting had been called *out of the regular time*, by a requisition from the Stewards, Leaders, &c., to Dr. Warren, and he knowing the advantage it might be of to him in furthering his views, to

* Dr. Warren's own "Digest of the laws of Methodism," contains the following clause:—"If any preacher refuse to submit to the above mode of trial, in any of the cases mentioned above, he shall be considered as suspended till the next Conference."—P. 226.

have the sole control of the meeting without the presence of his more constitutional colleague, agreed to the requisition *without Mr. Crowther's knowledge*; as he, Mr. C., actually had no idea that any intention of holding the meeting out of the usual time existed, till the afternoon of the very day on which it actually was held; when, on returning from Burslem, where he had been the preceeding day preaching their Sunday School Sermons, to his astonishment and pain he beheld the Quarterly Meeting assembled. He of course seated himself amongst them, and, however painful and bitter might be his feelings at the signal proof of treachery he was witnessing, he continued there and said nothing. But, when he beheld coming towards him, the author of this treachery, his face radiant with smiles, and his hand extended, as if in friendship, the spirit of his fathers rose within him, he felt that he was insulted and betrayed, and to accept that hand, at that time and place, would be to belie his own feelings, and sanction the act its owner had committed; and he answered, "No," Dr. Warren, I am no hypocrite; I cannot receive your hand till I have had an explanation." To appreciate justly the moral courage displayed here, it is necessary to recollect, that the majority of those present were opposed to him, to refuse the proffered hand must be highly unpopular, and expose him to great odium, and that in opposition to this he had no support but a stern sense of duty, and a strong feeling of probity which rose superior to hypocrisy and deceit. Mr. Crowther waited upon Dr. Warren the following morning, and

received from him the explanation required, accompanied with an apology for his conduct.

Another report has also been circulated with some degree of success, and may therefore be worth mentioning, viz :—that the funds for the support of this Institution are to be furnished out of the Missionary Collections. This is truly and essentially *false*. The Missionary Fund has always been held sacred to the purpose for which it has been collected, and will be so still ; and in no instance has it ever been proved to be used for a contrary purpose. The Institution is to be established and supported by a fund raised expressly for that purpose ; the subscribers' names with the sums subscribed may be seen on the cover of the Methodist Magazine for this month ; and it is worthy of remark, that the majority of these sums have been forwarded to the committee voluntarily and without personal solicitation. The circumstance that has given rise to the report appears to be the following. The Missionary Committee have been in the habit of providing means for the preparation of the young Missionaries for their arduous labours ; that considerable preparation and instruction are necessary on these occasions must be sufficiently obvious to every one. But the Missionary Committee do not possess the requisite means of instruction to the extent that might be wished. It was therefore judged expedient by them, when the Institution was about to be carried into effect, to endeavour to arrange with the Committee, for the education of these young men, conceiving that at such a place their object would be more completely and economically accom-

plished than elsewhere. The event justified the application, as the Committee's offer was found to be much lower than the expence hitherto incurred for this purpose ; and the superior advantages must be obvious to every one. These circumstances require only to be fully known to convert the present distrustful feeling towards the Missionary Committee into one of respect and approbation for their zeal and industry.

I have now reviewed a very few of the gross misrepresentations which have to some extent obtained credit ; and trust that these exposures will at least have the effect of placing you on your guard, and of shewing you the necessity of deferring your judgments till you have heard both sides of the question. This is all I ask.

Perhaps some may say, the word of an anonymous author is not entitled to credit—granted, but you may be anonymously directed where to look for truth. The actors in this affair, and numerous spectators are on the spot, ask them if you doubt. The persons implicated in this address are also here, and with the restless activity they have displayed throughout the affair, they will not fail, if a flaw should exist, to point it out. But till that is done, I may fairly claim for myself the credit of having put forth an uncontradicted and incontrovertible statement.